



DECISION NOTICE
FEATHER RIVER AQUATIC ORGANISM PASSAGE PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
MT. HOUGH RANGER DISTRICT
BUTTE AND PLUMAS COUNTIES, CALIFORNIA

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Forest Service and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) are proposing a joint agency project which would improve aquatic organism passage at five tributaries of the North Fork Feather River, along State Route (SR) 70, in Butte and Plumas Counties. The tributary crossings are located at post miles (PM) 42.06 (Mill Creek), 42.21 (unnamed tributary – channel I-1), and 46.44 (Bear Creek) in Butte County, and PM 23.67 (Rush Creek) and 31.82 (Soda Creek) in Plumas County. The U.S. Forest Service is the lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Caltrans is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). A NEPA Environmental Assessment and CEQA Initial Study have been prepared to examine potential environmental impacts of the proposed project.

DECISION

Based upon my review of the Feather River Aquatic Organism Passage Project Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to select Alternative A, which consists of constructing fish ladders in order to augment existing culverts for fish passage, and replacement of existing bridges/culverts with natural channel bottom structures that provide aquatic organism passage.

DECISION RATIONALE

The purpose of the project is to provide aquatic organism passage at five tributaries of the North Fork Feather River (NFFR) while maintaining public safety and function of SR 70. The project is needed as the five tributary crossings currently act as barriers to native fish, amphibians, and reptiles. These crossings prevent aquatic organism passage due to physical barriers (e.g. perched culvert inlet or outlet) or velocity barriers (e.g. water velocity too high for passage due to undersized culvert, lack of natural culvert roughness, or high degree of slope). Tributaries to the NFFR are extremely valuable to aquatic species, as they provide cold water refugia, cover from predators, resting pools, and spawning and rearing habitat.

The selected alternative, Alternative A, meets the project purpose and need by constructing fish ladders in order to augment existing culverts for native trout passage at Rush and Soda Creeks, as well as replacement of existing bridges/culverts with natural channel bottom structures that

provide aquatic organism passage for all species specific life stages at Mill Creek, channel I-1, and Bear Creek. Alternative A would contribute significantly to U.S. Forest Service objectives for aquatic organism passage and stream habitat improvement within the Plumas National Forest, and would restore spatial and temporal connectivity for aquatic and riparian species within and between watersheds.

Alternative B, the No-Action alternative, would not meet the project purpose and need. Alternative B would not provide suitable aquatic organism passage conditions and native fish and amphibian species would continue to be blocked from upstream migration. Native reptiles, amphibians, and other terrestrial wildlife would likely continue to utilize the surface of SR 70 for migration or movement within the drainage corridors, potentially resulting in roadway mortalities.

The Feather River Aquatic Organism Passage Project EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Plumas National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. People were invited to review and comment on the proposal through scoping letters which were distributed on November 7th, 2016 to various agency stakeholders, organizations, and individuals of the public within the project vicinity. Scoping letters were also sent to federally recognized tribes and local Native American communities and interested parties. The letters provided a description of the proposed action and apprised recipients of the preparation of the EA. To date, no comments have been received regarding the scoping letters.

Following completion of the EA, the document was circulated for public review and comment for a 30-day period from May 24 to June 23, 2017. A notice was published in the Feather River Bulletin on May 24, 2017 advertising the availability of the EA with instructions on how to submit comments. During the review period, the EA was made available online at the Plumas National Forest webpage and hard copies were distributed to various regulatory and planning agencies.

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), both responsible agencies¹ under CEQA, provided comments on the CEQA Initial Study. However, because a joint NEPA/CEQA document has been prepared, the comments are considered in reference to the document as a whole. These comments can be found in the project file and are available upon request.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (PNF LRMP) as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Final

¹"Responsible agency" means a public agency, other than the lead agency, which has responsibility for carrying out or approving a project. (California Code, Public Resource Code – PRC §21069)



Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision. The project was designed in conformance with the goals and objectives outlined in the PNF LRMP and contributes to the desired conditions described in that plan by improving species viability, plant and animal community diversity, and watershed condition and connectivity with the PNF.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

No objections were received. When no objection is filed within the objection filing period: (1) the reviewing officer must notify the responsible official. (2) Approval of the proposed project or activity documented in a DN may occur on, but not before, the fifth business day following the end of the objection filing period.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This project will start implementation as early as winter of 2017.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Kyla Sabo, District NEPA Planner, Mt. Hough Ranger District, Plumas National Forest, 39393 Hwy 70, Quincy CA, 95971, (530) 293-7619.

MICKI D. SMITH
District Ranger
Mt. Hough Ranger District, Plumas National Forest

10-23-17

Date

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.



To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.